

Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Initiative

'This is a world first for Australia. No other country is doing what you are doing and it seems to have had a tremendous start, this program. The uptake by Australian GPs in learning mental health skills exceeds my most optimistic predictions and I have discerned a very much changed attitude towards collaborative working in mental health'

Professor Sir David Goldberg, UK Institute of Psychiatry, May 2003

The *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Initiative*, introduced by the Commonwealth Government in the 2001/02 Federal Budget, offers a *system* of mental health care for Australia, responding to the barriers to mental health care commonly expressed by GPs. These barriers have included the need for relevant mental health training, access to specialist clinical support, access to other relevant professional services and remuneration that recognises the time and complexity of mental health consultations. The *Better Outcomes* initiative was developed to address the key support issues raised by GPs over many years.

- **Education and training for GPs** - to familiarise GPs with the initiative and to build their mental health assessment and treatment skills;
- **The 3 Step Mental Health Process** – remuneration is provided to encourage effective management of mental health problems by GPs through a 3 Step Mental Health Process that includes an assessment, a mental health plan and a review;
- **Focussed Psychological Strategies** - to encourage appropriately trained GPs to provide evidence based focused psychological strategies (FPS) through the provision of Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) rebates;
- **Access to Allied Health Services** - to enable GPs to access psychological and other allied health services to support their patients with mental health disorders; and
- **Access to Psychiatrist Support** - to better enable psychiatrists and GPs to participate in case conferencing and to provide a service to GPs through which they can access advice from psychiatrists in urgent situations.

Uptake

- 1 in 6 GPs nationally are participating in the Initiative. This is far in excess of initial projections of 1 in 14.
- Participation is almost as high as 1 in 4 in some States.
- Uptake has been particularly successful in rural and remote Australia. In RRMA 4 districts, 1 in 3 GPs are participating.
- 12% of level one registered GPs are now level two registered.
- Nationally, there are 69 allied health services covering 76 Divisions of General Practice, with take up in all Divisions expected by 2004-05.

Impact

There are positive reports from participating GPs, consumers and allied health professionals.

I have found the Initiative very useful for patients who wouldn't ordinarily be able to access allied health professionals, I have referred several patients to a psychologist with good results. Patients are thrilled as they are receiving access to treatment they have needed for years and, as a GP, I have found them easier to manage because of their improved mental health
GP Brisbane

"I've only just started using the Initiative. It's been six months since I went to training, I wasn't sure what was involved and was too busy to get started. When a GP colleague mentioned it was easy and worth doing, I decided I better give it a try. Now I'm on a roll, I don't find it difficult to integrate into my practice. I find it useful, well accepted by my patients and it allows me to reflect on what I and other providers are doing"
GP, Hobart

"An enormous amount of time is spent in counselling and treating mental health problems like depression, particularly in rural regions. I think the Better Outcomes initiative is terrific... Cost of services is an enormous barrier for patients in accessing the treatment they need. By being able to access a psychologist without that huge cost barrier has given me the opportunity to assist my patients where I don't have the expertise to help them. The initiative has given us a format to follow which I believe is of great benefit to us and to our patients. It's good to have a template. It's easy to miss something. It's been amazing to me having a slight plan to follow how many issues have arisen if I hadn't been prompted to ask. I do not find the 3 visits time consuming/burden on my practice. The 3 Step Process just reiterates how important continual contact with patients is".

GP, rural Victoria

"No, I don't have a problem with getting a Medicare bill that says 3 step process. I'm just glad that my problem is being taken seriously, that I've had treatment and now I'm getting better"
Lucy, consumer

"Evidence suggests this service is offering early intervention and continuity of care for clients with mental illness. It also potentially reduces stigma and offers affordable treatment.... There is global support from allied health professionals, GPs and clients for the continuation of this service. There is increased appreciation by both GPs and allied health professionals of each others' role"

Rural Division, Queensland

"A number of participating GPs have embraced the project and are making numerous and regular referrals, reporting high levels of satisfaction with the project mechanisms and patient outcomes"

Rural Division, Victoria

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